



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Public Accounts Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday, 19 September 2024**

**Meeting Location:** Room 21, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsyth, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

John Stewart, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

**Apologies:**

Daniel McCrossan, MLA (Chairperson)

**In Attendance:** Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)  
Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)  
Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)  
Barbara Daly (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.20pm in closed session

The Chairperson advised members of the requirement to declare interests in any items of business on the agenda, and discussed the substantive items of business to be considered.

The meeting moved into public session at 2.22 pm.

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Daniel McCrossan, MLA.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to send a letter of condolences to Daniel and the wider McCrossan family.

### **2. Draft minutes**

**Agreed:** The draft minutes of the meeting on 27 June 2024 were agreed.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

The Chairperson reminded members of their requirement to register their interests under Standing Order 69(5).

#### **4. Matters Arising**

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note that responses have been received from Departmental CoPEs in respect of the inquiry into Public Procurement in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to share the CoPE responses with the Northern Ireland Audit Office for inclusion in the inquiry into Public Procurement in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members noted correspondence dated 5 July 2024 from Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary and Accounting Officer, Department for Infrastructure, providing information requested in response to the Memorandum of Reply on Planning in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to forward the correspondence to the Infrastructure Committee for their information.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note correspondence dated 15 August 2024 from Colum Boyle, Permanent Secretary and Accounting Officer for the Department for Communities, providing a response to queries raised during the recent evidence session on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to share the correspondence with the Northern Ireland Audit Office for inclusion in the report on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note correspondence dated 20 August 2024 from Chris Quinn, Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner, providing further evidence following his recent attendance for the evidence session on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to share the correspondence with the Northern Ireland Audit Office for inclusion in the report on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

## **5. Chairperson's Business**

## **6. Correspondence**

Members noted a written submission to the Child Poverty in Northern Ireland inquiry from Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI).

**Agreed:** Members agreed to forward these submissions for consideration and inclusion in the final report.

Members noted a letter from Ann Watt of Pivotal providing a copy of their report on the first seven months of the restored NI Executive.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note this correspondence.

Members noted a letter from C&AG Dorinnia Carville regarding Departmental Guidance issued by the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note this correspondence.

## **7. Memorandum of Reply on Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland**

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.28 pm

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General, NI

Mrs Colette Kane, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the Memorandum of Reply received from the Department of Health.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an update in 12 months.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request quarterly updates on progress against actions.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek further clarification in respect of the use of data.

## **8. Inquiry on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland – Issues Paper**

Aoife Keating-Fitzpatrick from the Assembly Information and Research Service joined the meeting at 2.36 pm and provided a briefing to members on Child Poverty strategies in Scotland and New Zealand.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to publish the RalSe report on Child Poverty Strategies in Scotland and New Zealand to the Child Poverty in Northern Ireland Inquiry page on the Northern Ireland Assembly Website.

The Chairperson thanked Aoife Keating-Fitzpatrick for her presentation and attendance before the Committee.

Aoife Keating-Fitzpatrick left the meeting at 2.56pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.56 pm.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.56 pm.

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General

Mr Tomas Wilkinson, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office

Mr Barry Mitchell, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office

Ms Claire Turner, Senior Auditor, Northern Ireland Audit Office

Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office

The Committee received a briefing on the issues identified following its evidence sessions on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland, on 20 and 27 June 2024.

**Agreed:** Members agreed the issues to be included in the published report.

The Chairperson thanked officials for attending.

Officials left the meeting at 3.33 pm.

## **9. Inquiry on Major Capital Projects: Follow Up Report – Briefing Session**

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.33 pm

Ms Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Mrs Suzanne Murphy, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Liaison Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Members were reminded that the Committee's fourth inquiry is on 'Major Capital Projects'.

The Committee received a briefing in preparation for its first evidence session scheduled for 3 October 2024.

David Honeyford left the meeting at 3.37 pm.

David Honeyford joined the meeting at 3.39 pm.

The Chairperson thanked officials for attending.

Officials left the meeting at 4.14 pm.

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee was briefed on the draft Forward Work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed its forward work programme.

**Agreed:** Members agreed that the Committee's fifth inquiry will be Developing the skills for Northern Ireland's future.

John Stewart left the meeting at 4.29 pm.

## **11. Any Other Business**

The Clerk reminded members that an event is planned in Parliament Buildings on 7 November 2024 to launch the report into 'Child Poverty in Northern Ireland'.

**Agreed:** Members agreed submit suggestions for invitees to the launch event to Committee Staff.

## **12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance and advised members that the next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 26 September at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.29 pm.

**Cheryl Brownlee MLA**

**Deputy Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee**

**19 September 2024**